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SUBJECT: TSHISEKEDI QUIETLY RETURNS TO DRC IN APPARENT ILL
HEALTH

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Etienne Tshisekedi, president of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), quietly returned to Kinshasa May 28 after an extended stay in South Africa for medical treatment. UDPS officials acknowledge Tshisekedi, age 74, is in ill health and has been given strict orders from his doctors to rest. Tshisekedi's condition has increased speculation regarding the future of the UDPS. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Tshisekedi returned to Kinshasa May 28 from Johannesburg where he had been for medical treatment, according to UDPS officials. Much like his departure April 7, Tshisekedi's return was low key, and apparently unannounced

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to most party members. The UDPS president has not made any public statements or appearances since arriving.

¶3. (C) UDPS Secretary General Remy Masamba told PolOff May 31 that Tshisekedi is in increasingly ill health. Those present at this airport to witness Tshisekedi's arrival said the UDPS president looked "weak" and needed assistance departing the airplane. Masamba said Tshisekedi has difficulty walking, in part because his vision has deteriorated significantly, making it difficult for him to maintain his balance. Masamba openly speculated the UDPS leader's mental capability is seriously diminished, adding to his physical ailments. (Note: Rumors concerning Tshisekedi's mental acuity have been circulating for some time. End note.) Tshisekedi, according to Masamba, has been ordered by his doctor to maintain strict rest, to refrain from public appearances and political activity, and not to receive visitors. Masamba said doctors counseled Tshisekedi that any additional stress could negatively impact his health.

¶4. (C) Masamba said Tshisekedi first asked UDPS officials to organize a large rally for his return, originally scheduled for June 3. Tshisekedi then apparently changed his mind, telling Masamba and UDPS National Committee President Valentin Mubake to scrap any such plans since he would be arriving late in the day from South Africa. Then, Tshisekedi called Masamba May 27 to inform him he would be returning the following day, insisting again there be no public rally welcoming him home. Masamba said Tshisekedi's tone during these conversations was somber and dispirited, further confirming his own suspicions that the UDPS president was not in good health.

¶5. (C) Given Tshisekedi's condition -- and possible inability to run the party -- speculation has increased among party insiders about the UDPS's future. Masamba told PolOff that

were Tshisekedi to retire or pass away, the UDPS would most certainly split into differing factions. He explained the most likely scenario would be the creation of separate factions led by himself, by Mubake, and by Tshisekedi political adviser Jean-Joseph Mukendi. Masamba claimed (comment: not surprisingly) he would have the biggest number of followers, adding that Mubake would be rejected for being too much of a hard-liner, and that Mukendi would either align with him or be considered as too "tribalistic," as he is from the same region as Tshisekedi. Masamba further claimed he is not openly courting support from party members, but that Mubake likely is.

¶6. (C) Comment: Regardless of Tshisekedi's health, the UDPS is a spent political force. Tshisekedi's miscalculation in 2005 to boycott elections cost him and the UDPS dearly, and now the party finds itself both still out of power and supplanted as the DRC's leading opposition group. While his physical condition is likely deteriorating, Tshisekedi's demise has been erroneously predicted before. Masamba's theories of revitalizing the party notwithstanding, Tshisekedi's passing or retirement would likely spell the end

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of the UDPS. End comment.
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